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DRAFT v3

November 12, 2019

Dear Mayor Jenny Durkan,

Thank you for your thorough [October 18 reply](#) to the Urban Forest Commission's (UFC) [October 9 letter](#): "Funding levels for the Green Seattle Partnership." The UFC sees this as a reflection of the importance you place on the Green Seattle Partnership ("Program") as well as your continued engagement with the UFC.

As you correctly call out, the UFC cares strongly about this issue. More importantly, the UFC's passion is matched by its unique expertise in the issues discussed here. UFC members were appointed specifically for their ability to provide recommendations on topics such as this program, including shifts from capital to maintenance as it relates to forest restoration. Moreover, the UFC is under explicit codified responsibility to take the time to provide input on these topics.

Thank you for the clarifying that the reduction in program funding of \$880,000 is coming from the General Fund, not the Parks District funding. The UFC is trying to better understand this important Program's budget and appreciates the briefing Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) provided on November 6. Specifically, the UFC is eager to understand two key issues: the connection between Program funding levels and their ability to achieve their recent strategic plan; and what decisions and considerations are driving the proposed budget reductions.

[In the presentation, ParksSPR outlined a plan for enrolling 41 new acres in the Program in the next year.](#) When the Program updated its strategic plan in 2017, it stated that to reach their 2025 goal, 141 acres would need to be enrolled annually moving forward, an increase from the 123 acres enrolled annually, to date- ([GSP Strategic Plan Update p.21](#)). [This 2019-2020 budget change is therefore dramatically out of line with planned spending and optimal program operation.](#) This need of ongoing (if not increased) capital investment was supported by information provided to the UFC by SPR staff on [December 13, 2017](#), which included the following graph:

Total annual REET and Park District funding for the next four years:



This forecasted Program funding need, including General Fund REET, *increasing* through 2019 and 2020. However, instead the program experienced a given that, nan \$880,000 reduction from a \$4,500,000 budget, representing a substantial change. SPR staff mentioned that City Council is asking SPR to respond to a Statement of Legislative Intent. The UFC appreciates this request and believes it will provide an opportunity for the Program to determine funding needs, both Capital and O&M, right this wrong and to deliver on its goals.

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~~The UFC recognizes that the City has many competing budgetary priorities, and that sometimes tough decisions need to be made. Equally as important in oversight is the transparency of any reduction in public funding for such programs, especially one that is an actual line item in the Parks District budget.~~

Based on what the UFC learned during the November 6 briefing, the UFC sees several risks and concerns being introduced to the program due to this shift in funding:

1. Budget priority. The City adopted the largest budget in history, yet the Program budget was cut. This could set a dangerous precedent for future cuts that would reduce support for urban forestry and Program goals.
2. General Fund vulnerability. The flexibility provided by General Fund also brings uncertainty for program funding levels. General Fund is also more likely to change with a changing economy. Parks District Funding was intended to protect the program from these types of swings.
3. The UFC is seeing Dramatic sshifts in the Program commitments. (Saving our City Forests -- funding intended for the Green Seattle Partnership) not only of funding that was

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identified as a line-item in the [6 year Parks District budget](#) and voted on by Seattle residents, ~~but Additionally, also of the~~ activities ~~being~~ undertaken by the Natural Area Crew ~~do not reflect the Program goals, but wider Parks' needs.~~ [Both these instances reflect going back on a series of commitments documented in the Program plans promise with](#) likely impact voter trust and support for future funding requests. ~~It's important to protect the significant investment in the Program done by the City, its partners, and Seattle volunteers.~~

4. ~~O&M usage.~~ The shift from Capital funding to O&M which will not support the establishment phase of acres incorporated into the Program. Establishment is not the same as maintenance, and it's likely to become more challenging given the impacts of climate change, [homelessness, and other impacts not internalized in the initial planning processes.](#) ~~It's important to protect the significant investment in the Program done by the City, its partners, and Seattle volunteers.~~

4. The UFC also learned that hiring processes meant to support the Program in 2019 did not take place. If this was not done to fulfill a budget reduction then the UFC would recommend transferring back those funds to the Capital side of the Program budget.

[The UFC recognizes that the City has many competing budgetary priorities, and that sometimes tough decisions need to be made. Equally as important in oversight is the transparency of any reduction in public funding for such programs, especially one that is an actual line item in the Parks District budget.](#)

[Thank you again for your continued work on this critical program.](#)

Sincerely,

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